



★ VIRGINIA ★
DEPARTMENT *of* ELECTIONS

the Handbook

Chapter 18

Satellite Offices

July 2020

<p>REQUIRED FORMS</p> <p>Satellite Early Voting Checklist</p>	<p>ADDITIONAL RESOURCES</p> <p>Virginia Constitution Code of Virginia Charter Provisions</p>
<p>REFERENCE</p>	<p>REGULATIONS</p> <p>1VAC20-70-60 <i>Satellite Offices</i></p>

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18. Satellite Offices

18.1 IN GENERAL

“The governing body of any county or city may establish, by ordinance, voter satellite offices to be used in the locality for absentee voting in person. The governing body may establish as many offices as it deems necessary. No change in, including the creation or abolishment of, any voter satellite office shall be enacted within 60 days next preceding any general election. Notice shall be published prior to enactment in a newspaper having general circulation in the locality once a week for two successive weeks.”¹

As absentee voting increases in popularity, localities may wish to open satellite offices to use for absentee voting in person. The decision whether to open a satellite office or multiple satellite offices should be made by your locality in consultation with both the general registrar and members of the electoral board. Here are some factors to consider when determining whether to have voter satellite offices for in person absentee voting:

- Can your general registrar’s office alone handle the expected volume of in person absentee voting?
- Would opening a satellite office or offices ease the burden on your registrar’s office?
- Are there public buildings in your locality that are ADA compliant and could be used as satellite offices?

If your locality does desire to open one or more satellite offices, here are some additional considerations to make

- Are you placing satellite offices in high population areas to guarantee maximum value?
- If you have multiple offices, are they in distinct geographical areas within your locality to serve all local communities?
- Do you have adequate staff and volunteers to run the number of satellite offices that you wish to open?
- Do you have the additional resources required to operate these locations, including voting machines, physical space (for example parking), ballots of every ballot style, and an adequate internet and cyber-security infrastructure?

18.2 ESTABLISHING A SATELLITE OFFICE

As noted above, satellite offices must be established by local ordinance. Your local governing body has its own process for establishing ordinances, and the process for establishing satellite offices should be the same as the process for establishing a polling place location. If you are unsure of your local process, you may wish to contact your city or county’s attorney’s office for further information.

Attention: Establishing, abolishing, or changing a satellite office cannot be done within sixty days of a general election.

18.3 REQUIREMENTS

Voter satellite offices for in person absentee voting must meet the following requirements:

- Must be in a public building owned or leased by the county, city, or town
- Must be accessible to qualified voters and in compliance with the Virginians with Disabilities Act and the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act

¹ See Virginia Code § 24.2-701.2 (effective July 1, 2020).

- The governing body of each county, city, and/or town shall provide funds to enable the general registrar to provide adequate facilities for the conduct of elections

18.4 NOTICE

Prior to enacting a new satellite office or changing a location, notice shall be provided in a newspaper having general circulation in the locality once a week for two successive weeks.

Not later than 55 days prior to any election, the general registrar shall post notice of all satellite offices and the dates and hours of operation of each in the office of the general registrar AND on the official website for the county or city. This notice shall remain for the duration of the absentee voting period.

18.5 EMERGENCY CHANGES

If an office becomes unusable due to an emergency, the electoral board or general registrar shall provide an alternative location subject to State Board approval. The registrar will provide notice to voters appropriate to the circumstances of the emergency. Generally, this means providing as much notice as possible given the proximity of the emergency to an upcoming election.

18.6 HOURS OF OPERATION

Localities may choose the hours that their satellite offices operate, so long as appropriate notice is given of the times and dates. However, satellite offices are **required** to be open a minimum of eight hours between 8:00 and 5:00 pm on the first and second Saturday immediately preceding an election. Localities should operate their satellite offices in ways that are fair to all members of their community, guaranteeing absentee voting access for all voters in the locality.

18.7 CYBERSECURITY EXPECTATIONS

Because voter satellite offices essentially serve as early polling places, there must be measures in place to guarantee the cyber security of each satellite office. The State Board of Elections, through the Department of Elections, has promulgated a [cybersecurity readiness checklist](#). Localities will need to complete this checklist and meet all relevant deadlines before the Department of Elections will allow a satellite office to have VERIS and e-pollbook connectivity. If you are considering opening satellite offices, please complete a readiness checklist for each satellite office that your locality is establishing. The checklist can be obtained through the Department of Elections.

APPENDIX A

Commonwealth of Virginia Early Voting Satellite Location Guidelines

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to establish uniform satellite location guidelines for Early Voting in the Commonwealth of Virginia. These guidelines are provided to address the various components and processes involved in the administration of elections.

1. Overview of Satellite Location

A satellite location(s) is a large polling location provided to have easier access for voters during the Early Voting period (**45 days before the Election**). A satellite location(s) will include tables and chairs set up just like a precinct polling location, except that all ballot styles must be provided. Additionally, all voting equipment must set up like CAP to accept all ballot styles.

Outdoor and indoor signage will be very important for direction on where to enter, check-in, vote and exit.

General Registrars (GRs) should plan to have extra personnel to utilize as runners to travel to and from the GR office as needed.

2. Consider the following components when selecting a satellite location:

1. Traffic flow
 - a. Easy entrance and easy exit
 - b. Evaluate/review need for traffic control
2. Parking area
 - a. Estimate how many voters anticipated in an hour at the height of voting (10-12 days before the Election); look at your past absentee ballot numbers to make the estimate.
 - b. Plan for one voter per car to determine how many parking spaces may be needed
 - c. Consider other area businesses/offices in the same facility and their parking needs during the same hours as the satellite location
 - d. Consider the following peak hours for voting:
 - i. From 7 am to 9 am
 - ii. From noon to 1 pm
 - iii. From 4 pm to 5pm
3. Visibility
 - a. Location is easily visible from the road
 - b. Signage can be posted in areas to help direct voters
 - c. The location is in a secure area
4. Cost
 - a. Monthly and/or bi-monthly lease(s) are available
 - b. Utilities included in the rent/lease price

c. Government and/or public property

5. Facilities

a. Public restrooms are available

b. Ramps are provided for wheelchair access

c. Doors meet the HAVA required width and have mechanical switches to open for access

d. Heating and air conditioning in the facility

e. Large room area(s) / tables and chairs available / multiple electrical outlets

6. Communication

a. Access to telephone service, if possible

b. Access to internet access through VPN service

Appendix B

Commonwealth of Virginia Off-Site Satellite Early Voting Locations Contingency Plan

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to confirm that each locality may open satellite locations during the Early Voting period prior to Election Day, beginning in November 2020.

Basis for Developing Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)

Consider the following items in developing a COOP for the Early Voting period:

1. Loss of connectivity to State VERIS for voter check-in

Alert Level: HIGH

Inability to instantly update voter history, which prevents voters from voting at multiple early voting locations in one day.

Contingency Plan:

- a. Maintain backup data file of all eligible voters on laptops. This data file **MUST** be updated on a nightly basis during the early voting time period.
- b. If laptops are not usable, provide all locations with visual precinct boundary maps for use in determining correct ballot style.
- c. Any voter checked in using the backup data file would seal their voted ballot in a provisional check-in ballot envelope. Poll Workers would complete the necessary information on the ballot envelope.
- d. When connectivity is restored, poll workers would update the voter history in VERIS using the information on the sealed ballot envelope and note that these ballots are now eligible to be counted.

2. Loss of electricity in any Early Voting location

Inability to check-in voters; voting equipment would be on battery backup.

Contingency Plan:

- a. Supply all early voting locations with fully charged portable battery packs to charge laptops and EPB devices. These battery packs can also be used to charge cell phones for poll worker use, if required.
- b. If battery backup on voting equipment fails, resort to placing ballots in the auxiliary bin for scanning when power is restored.
- c. Consider renting portable generators for large capacity early voting locations.

3. Parking and traffic flow concerns

Contingency Plan:

- a. Notify area police and sheriff department officials of peak early voting days. Request traffic control assistance, including potential redirecting of traffic flow during peak voting times.
- b. Work with nearby businesses/office complexes to utilize available parking during peak times.

4. Long lines for voter check-in

Contingency Plan:

- a. Monitor timing and flow of voters to inform voters in line of approximate wait period. Stage a poll worker to “walk the line” and inform voters of the wait time and other options available to them.
- b. Stay in touch with other early voting locations to monitor number of voters in line. Redirect voters to other sites that are experiencing shorter lines.

5. Shortage of ballots

Contingency Plan:

- a. Develop a ballot tracking method that provides advance notice of upcoming ballot shortages for certain ballot styles.
- b. Designate “ballot runners” to retrieve additional ballots PRIOR to running out.
- c. If using a Ballot On Demand printer, have a backup printer or supply of ballots for all precincts in the event of printer breakdowns.

6. Shortage of workers

Contingency Plan:

- a. Designate and train backup poll workers to assist during absences and/or peak voting time periods.
- b. Reallocate staff from locations with lower voter turnout to the high turnout locations.
- c. Train all full time staff on the early voting check-in process. Utilize the full time staff when there are no other options.